



December 4, 2008

Dear Army National Guard Family,

2008 was a year of persistent pride for our 372-year old organization. We have transformed into the strongest Guard ever due to the robustness of our programs and the quality and quantity of our force. Transformation of a military force is hinged upon two key influencers – the needs of the Nation; and the attitude of those serving in that force. For the men and women of the Army National Guard it's all about attitude. Attitude is none too easy a metric to chart. Yet there is an almost tangible patriotic spirit bursting in this generation of Citizen Soldiers determined not just to play mere supporting parts, but assume lead roles in an era that defines who we are as Americans. And in 2008 alone, over 361,000 Citizens stepped forward as Soldiers to do more than just read history, but make it.

Bolstering the surge in ranks and pride was the addition of Dale Earnhardt, Jr. to our Guard Team. '08 dawned the age of 88! This combined with further music, television, and sport celebrity partnerships leavened our community based force into a nationally identified franchise. From NASCAR to Orange County Choppers to 3 Doors Down, Kid Rock, and Michael Jordan, the National Guard brand has become a blend of legacy and luster that resonates amongst Americans seeking to be part of something greater than self. This unique marketing strategy has drawn the sled of recruiting up onto rooftops formerly thought unreachable.

With the change of seasons, we move into another season of change for our organization and our country. The peaceful transition of power is a bedrock tenant of a free society undergirded by seasoned Soldiers who maintain in the world what Abraham Lincoln declared to be, *that form and substance of government, whose leading object is to elevate the condition of men.*

To clear for all, the chance for a persistent peace is a pursuit that remains worth fighting for. I am enormously proud of all in this organization whose selfless-service affords those around the world the promise of an unfettered start. For after seven years of persistent conflict, the burdens of battle have been borne by all who serve and all who support those who serve. During the holiday season let us be vigilant in reaching out to our family, friends, and colleagues whose feelings of grief and loss can often be exacerbated. And at that time of year when the world's all aglow, remember always in your thoughts and prayers our Soldiers at war who *keep watch in fields at night* and refract the eternal light of freedom across the globe.

Happy Holidays,

**Clyde A. Vaughn
Lieutenant General, U.S. Army
Director, Army National Guard**